

WILLIAM A. LITTLE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
LABOR ARCHIVES OF WASHINGTON
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON LIBRARIES SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

ROBERT JEFFIERS
REGIONAL DIRECTOR, EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION

INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT JEFFIERS

INTERVIEWERS: WILLIAM LITTLE

SUBJECTS: CENTRAL CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION; FEDERAL INVESTIGATION; BLACK COMMUNITY; JUSTICE DEPARTMENT; DEMONSTRATIONS; EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION

LOCATION: SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

DATE: OCTOBER 31, 1975

INTERVIEW LENGTH: 00:13:46

FILE NAME: JeffiersRobert_WLOHP_1975_Audio_acc2610-003.mp3

The Labor Archives of Washington is committed to preserving the voices and stories of individuals who have contributed to the labor movement's rich history. The LAW presents oral history interviews as part of its contribution to helping curate and create access to a broad and inclusive historical record. These interviews contain the personal recollections and opinions of the individuals involved and, therefore, may contain language, ideas or stereotypes that are offensive or harmful to others.

Individual oral histories cannot serve as the sole source of historical information about an institution or event. These narratives do not represent the views of the Labor Archives of Washington, Libraries Special Collections, or the University of Washington, past or present.

[00:00:00] **ROBERT:** I think it was January 1969 we conducted some investigation in the construction trades, and I guess several other kinds. I was introduced to CCA, to many of the people, many of the members and people who were really trying to bring about a change as it relates to development and job opportunities where Blacks in the areas of construction had been traditionally left out. At the time of my arrival, the CCA and I think some other allied groups that were working with them—there was some Japanese, maybe an Asian American group and other groups, I guess—were picketing job sites, they were demonstrating. They had a large demonstration at SeaTac Airport, during which time I think they stopped the construction there. And there was some of the equipment damaged, and had a lot of arrests made. At that time, the CCA was under the leadership of Tyree [Scott]. He had an assistant by the name of Harley Bird. I also met Mike Ross then, every time I'd go there, he was with them.

Shortly after I arrived, I think there were some demonstrations down at the new county building where they were building a new building down there, and the hard hats marched and demonstrated also. Shortly thereafter, I attended all kinds of meetings. They did an investigation on [?foreign industry?], and subsequently there was a consent decree attended to by many groups within the industry that was supposed to bring about some job opportunities for Blacks and minorities. Are there any specific areas that you want to—are you familiar with the consent decree?

[00:02:55] **WILLIAM:** Not really, that was the first one between what construction?

[00:03:00] **ROBERT:** The consent decree covered the ironworkers... Better yet, why don't I just step back and pull a copy of it and give it to you, then you'll have it all.

Now, I was involved when the Justice Department came in, but I was involved in assisting them in doing part of the investigation. That was because of the many instances of going in the Black community and some folks can't gain information. For instance, I recall one agent going to a door, knocking on the door, the guy comes to the door, and he asks for the person who was at the door, and the guy asks, "Well, what do you want?" and the guy identified himself, and the guy said, "He's not here." Well, none of that was evident with us. They had a hard time locating people. We did not have that problem. Also, we made our investigation unusual hours and in unusual places, where the traditional investigators, they didn't do that. I'm subject to make an investigation of a crap game down at the tavern, if that's where my subject is. I have to go and talk to him, and there's no problem in communicating between—it became a Black communication thing, where if you understand the language, you can get—there were many instances of Black folks just don't communicate on the same level, like a guy talking about his ride, well, the man asked him, "What are you talking about?" You know, and using the dialect.

But during the course of these investigations—I'm giving you bits and pieces because that's how I recall it—I recall there were all kinds of disruptions, disorganization within. The contractors, the Black contractors, they were all trying extremely hard, and I think a lot of the problems were that it happened so fast. Terms about revolutionizing the industry, getting their fair share, where they could bring home [inaudible], but Black contractors, for some reason, they have never had any problem getting qualified Black employees. So by getting the Black contractors involved, you're able to get Black workers.

And in the course of our investigation, many people involved in CCA were able to give us all kinds of leads. They participated with us pretty fully in terms of knowing people who have applied for jobs, knowing when they were turned down, how they were turned down. Matter of fact, they gave us service was fantastic. They even would pick up an individual at his house and deliver that individual to the job. They would take him to the union, get him in the union, take him to the job and check on him, counsel him, you know, what have you, to see that the person becomes successful. The apprentice would train you and have you. They even trained people to take tests. They gave a damned good service, and they didn't take no bonanza.

They pushed, and I'd say Tyree and the group, they really did push. I think they did a very good job. And when you think about the shoestrings they were working with, they did an unbelievable job. But I think with the net results of everything that happened, a few has come out with something, but in total, I think that we could say [W.C.] Handy made it real right in his St. Louis Blues, feeling tomorrow just like I'm feeling today. I think Lou Rawls shouted loud and clear, everyday we have the blues. That's about the size of the achievement and where we really are. We made progress, but making progress in terms of economic citizenship, whether it was by CCA or anyone else has been like trying to empty Lake Washington by teacup.

So with all the things we got done and pushed for them, doing lots of little things, ironworkers run us off of the job. Matter of fact, I didn't have time to stop for the car, they were too close. I was investigating a site.

[00:08:25] **WILLIAM:** When was this?

[00:08:27] **ROBERT:** That's in 19—I think that was '69? I'd have to check, look at my old records, call the record center. I've forgotten. [?Scottie Shelton?] and myself. Scottie was an investigator, and then he later became the district director. He was my predecessor. Scottie worked far more on it than I did, this was his territory, and I worked mostly Eastern Washington and Idaho and Oregon, the eastern parts of it. Got into Montana. But you'll find that faces change a bit, but in terms of the process, it's quite slow. The fight is still going on, consent decree is still monitored. And I can't say it any better than I said when I made the statement about Handy's blues: the change hasn't come yet. And at the rate it's going, it'll be some years before many of those same people achieve anything.

But all during that course of the time of my investigations up here, CCA was really training. They were providing a service that I'm not too certain they realized how heavy it was, from picking the guy up on the job, to taking him to training classes, working with him, seeing that he went to school, pushing him in school, see that he was on the job, that he paid his union dues, monitoring the whole process. I think they did a fantastic job.

I also was up here during the time of the consent decree in court. I was at the demonstrations, and I had to leave because it was said that I was involved in the demonstrations. I think that was said simply because I came into Seattle with my hair as it is, and back then there weren't very many people wearing their hair as long, mine was probably the longest, and I wear daishikis, but I always wore a tie and a shirt with my daishiki. That was never liked during the course of my investigations, and it had a stigma. And because of being at the scene of demonstrations in the daishiki, asking questions and what have you, there were some complaints made, of which I had to lay the answer for, that nothing ever came of, and I was—for some reason I never came back up here, and I subsequently quit and took another job. But I did come back to the Commission.

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

...I don't get involved in that. If I get a complaint against a respondent who comes under the decree, what I do [is] I refer that complaint to our litigation arm, which is a monitoring body of [?twenty-five in court?]. Now, they're not a part of my office, but they're part of my agency. If they're able to look into it and find that this decree related, what they will do is they will investigate it and eliminate the discriminatory practice. If it does not come in under the decree, then it comes back to me, and we investigate, make a determination on it, and go through our normal procedure in terms of conciliation if necessary. But I would say the majority of things that come in are worked on right under the consent decree. Now, the person that monitors that is Cal Boulding. Have you ever talked to Cal?

[00:13:19] **WILLIAM:** Yeah, I talked to Cal already.

[00:13:20] **ROBERT:** Now, Cal monitors the decree. The court opponent—the court required the Justice Department to monitor, but when EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] after the '72 amendment required that EEOC could [inaudible].